

Issue Thirteen May 2021

aargh!

Aotearoa Anarchist Review



Fight Back

HERE WE are in year 2 A.C. (After COVID), and everything is back to normal - the normality of capitalism, the normal racism, the normal housing crisis, the normal lack of willingness to do anything substantial about climate change.

For a while, even mainstream society was talking about mutual aid instead of making profit, about how capitalism prevents real change that benefits people. We saw what a government that has the political will is able to do: wage subsidies were paid at short notice and without bureaucratic hurdles. The work of low-paid but essential workers was suddenly recognised. The Prime Minister spoke a lot about kindness. People were able to imagine what a different world could look like.

Now we are back to normal. Having a secure home remains a distant dream for more and more people. The most the government was prepared to do was to remove a tax benefit for landlords. Woohoo.

As the climate emergency worsens, the government is showing its complete lack of imagination. The government's climate change plans are woefully inadequate. Replacing all our (already way too many) petrol cars with electric ones and cutting people's gas heaters off isn't going to do it.

The latest return to racist normality is the artificial differentiation between 'proper' NZ citizens and mere residents. During all the lockdown measures the government has treated them the same. It was bad enough that temporary visa holders had little chance of staying here and a lot of them were forced back to countries where COVID is raging. But now with the new 'very high risk countries', all of a sudden people who live here but do not have NZ passports had their rights stripped away at a moments' notice.

As if NZ passport holders are more immune to COVID than others.

The underlying problem is that NZ's only defence against the virus is a closed border. We still don't have proper quarantine places instead of hotels, and NZ's hospital system is run down - NZ has a fraction of the number of ICU beds per population as other countries have and the same goes for ventilators. Therefore the number of returnees who need to be quarantined had to be reduced. And the knee-jerk reaction was to separate along nationalistic lines. 'Be kind, stay safe' was last year.

If there is to be real change, we are the ones who need to imagine it and make it happen. The government won't.

@@@

Cover: Protestors in downtown Yangon, Burma/Myanmar, the week following the Military coup of February 1 (see page 8)

**aargh! is an anarchist periodical produced in
Te Whanganui-A-Tara/Wellington, Aotearoa, by the Freedom Shop Collective.**

If you'd like another copy of this one, send us an envelope addressed to yourself and with an appropriate stamp and we'll mail you one. Send us ten dollars and we'll send five copies for you to give to your friends and family, who are bound to be delighted. Also feel free to send us money for more copies of back issues or a ten dollar subscription for the next four issues. We don't know when the next issue will come out, but it's sure to happen sometime.

Contact us by e-mail at freedomshopaotearoa@gmail.com

or, if you are conversant with the technology, write to us by 'post' at

P.O. Box 9263, Wellington 6141, Aotearoa/New Zealand

And check our blog for news and events at freedomshopaotearoa.blogspot.co.nz

ISSN 2382-1353 (Print)

ISSN 2382-1361 (Online)

Stuff Racism

Or the problem with the colonial noose

FOLLOWING AN international trend, it has become something of an annual event: a large organisation publishes a big Mea Culpa in which it recognises and apologises for past racism and promises that these days are over. Everything is different now, everyone has seen the light and it will never happen again. The whole thing is blown up so much that it actually becomes an advertising campaign in itself, especially when it is a media organisation which lives by people reading its stories.

This year it's *Stuff's* turn. In November 2020, *Stuff* started a series called "Our Truth, Tā Mātou Pono" which began with: "Over three centuries we've failed to represent Māori fairly. From perpetuated stereotypes to presenting the world through a monocultural lens, our coverage of Māori has typically been biased and unjust."

Wow, that's something. So how did they arrive at that? Did they commission an investigation by Māori academics? Did they survey their readership? It turns out the same journalists who wrote all the racist stories in the first place investigated themselves. "The media organisation issued an historic public apology on Monday following the Our Truth, Tā Mātou Pono investigation which saw around 20 *Stuff* journalists scrutinise the company's portrayal and representation of Māori from its early editions to now."

Whenever anyone calls something they do "historic", alarm bells should go off. *Stuff's* CEO continues: "When the project started, we didn't know what we were going to find. They didn't start off with a particular agenda..." They had no idea they would find racist attitudes in 160 years of the settler press? This is where one reaches for ear muffs to handle the deafening noise of the alarm bells. "After doing a deep examination... the finding was that over time, there had been many instances of where you could say that the work that our papers produced could have perpetuated negative stereotypes or misconceptions against Māori."

"Over time", "instances", "could have"? Seriously? The thing is that it's not like *Stuff* weren't alerted to their continued racism at the time, especially in the last 20 years.

Take one example that *Stuff* now lists as a case of past racism. In 2013 – not so long ago, but not the most recent case – the *Marlborough Express* (owned by *Stuff*) published a cartoon by Al Nisbet depicting four adults and four children, all in school uniforms and carrying bowls, heading towards "Free School Meals" (which the government had just announced). The two most prominent figures in the foreground are large, brown-skinned adults, with one of them saying to the other: "If we can get away with this, the more cash left for booze, smokes and pokies".

There was significant public outrage over the cartoon (and over a similar cartoon published in the *Press* the next day). Then Race Relations Commissioner Susan Devoy said it was "insulting and derogatory in the extreme", Mana Party chair John Minto and Māori Party MP Te Ururoa Flavell called out the racism.

The paper and the author stood by the cartoon and saw no reason to apologise. Editor Steve Mason said it was supposed to stimulate discussion and while it "may be seen to be racist it certainly didn't set out to be racist." The author, Al Nisbet went further by saying he didn't understand what the fuss was about since he had done "a hell of a lot worse". The mind boggles – racism isn't racism when one didn't intend it to be or when one has said even more racist things in the past.

Labour MP Louisa Wall then took the case to the Human Rights Review Tribunal where it was dismissed on the grounds that it was not likely to "excite hostility against or to bring into contempt Māori and Pacifica on the ground of their colour, race, or ethnic or national origins". While the tribunal agreed that the cartoon was insulting and discriminating, it wasn't racist. It is unclear what depiction of Māori would meet that threshold. The High Court then dismissed the appeal with the usual argument of Freedom of Expression being more important than any protection against hate speech. *Stuff* ended the contract with Nisbet in 2018, to which he reacted by saying that he might as well move to North Korea because there was more freedom of speech there. It is unclear whether he did.

It was the usual pattern of racists, that Nisbet brought to the point when he said: "I was born in Scotland, we get stereotyped all the time. But you don't hear Scots complaining because they've got a sense of humour." You say something that is clearly racist or otherwise hurtful and when someone calls you out, you declare it to be a joke and accuse the victim of lacking a sense of humour. Bullying 101.

So why did *Stuff* defend the cartoons as nothing but good humour eight years ago and now admit that they were part of a racist continuity? *Stuff's* only (implicit) explanation is that the company changed from Australian ownership to New Zealand and that "the shift [...] provides the company with the opportunity to reset and reposition the business, and its value system."

That's not just lame, it implies that either the previous owners encouraged racist content (which doesn't leave much of the "free press" image) or that none of the editorial staff noticed their own racism, which is unlikely given the debate around just the one cartoon in 2013.

Stuff claims that the racism is behind them and now it is their "wish to be a trusted partner for tangata whenua for generations to come." So how anti-racist is the *Stuff* page today?

On 9 February 2021, Māori Party MP Rawiri Waititi was ejected from Parliament like a school boy for not wearing a neck tie. *Stuff* reported about how the event unfolded in detail and then quoted speaker Trevor Mallard, as well as people who weren't actually involved in the dispute. One person whose opinion was not sought was Waititi himself. He did speak to media outside the chamber where he explained that he wasn't prepared to wear "a colonial noose", but *Stuff* took no notice of it. Did *Stuff* think that a Māori perspective was not required?

A couple of weeks later, on 22 February, *Stuff* reported about the Wainuiomata Community Board naming a street after a Pākehā mayor, and rejecting the Māori name that had been proposed by local high school students. The article itself is not remarkable, if it weren't for a footnote: "The Māori name put forward for the new street was Raukura, not Ruakara, as previously reported." Would they have made such a mistake with an English name?

Often it is not the actual content of a story but more what is being reported on and what is missing that is the issue. Looking at *Stuff*, one can't help noticing that success and failure, good and bad news are still defined in upper middle class Pākehā terms. Success stories are usually those of rich property investors (especially those "who bought five houses during lockdown [and plan] to own 25 by 2025"). Bad news is when a luxury department store is closing, or a "shock fall in unemployment". Positive stories are about the opportunity for "Kiwis" to colonise remote places in the Cook Islands that have so far managed to escape tourism.

Unless that changes, we are left with the impression that Our Truth is just another PR exercise.

@@@



Fukushima 10 years on

TEN YEARS ago, on 11 March 2011, a magnitude 9.0 earthquake struck 370 km north-east of Tokyo. While the death toll from the quake itself was low, the tsunami that followed 30 minutes later destroyed entire townships, killing 20,000 people.

A 14m high wave also hit the nuclear power plant Fukushima Daiichi, located about 100km from the epicentre. Daiichi was one of the largest power plants in the world, producing 4.5GW from six reactors.

The oldest part was exactly 40 years old when the tsunami hit. It was designed by US multi-national General Electric, and was operated by the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO). Daiichi was situated directly on the Pacific coast, which meant that it had easy access to cooling water.

The original plan had been for it to sit on a bluff, about 35m above sea level. Nuclear reactors need a lot of cooling water, so in order to save energy for pumping the water into the plant, it was decided to lower the site down to 10 metres above sea level, despite past tsunamis having created larger waves. That meant that the 2011 tsunami washed right into the plant.

Three of the reactors had been shut down for maintenance and the other three shut down automatically when the earthquake happened. However, that didn't make them less dangerous. Nuclear reactors produce a huge amount of heat, even a long time after they have been shut down. Because the plant was no longer generating electricity after the emergency shutdown, it was completely relying on emergency power generators to continue cooling the reactors and the old fuel rods that are stored next to it. But the power generators got flooded and stopped

However, it wasn't just the cooling that was affected, as the official report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) notes: "As all electrical power was lost in Units 1 and 2, there were no indications available to the operators on the status of key systems and components to determine whether the safety systems were operating properly, or operating at all." Staff on site had no idea what was happening or what to do, because "in the absence of procedures addressing the loss of all power, the operators of Units 1, 2 and 4 did not have specific instructions on how to deal with [a blackout] under these conditions".

The result was the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in 1986. Three of the reactors experienced a meltdown. As is common in situations like that, the operator initially denied that there was a problem.

TEPCO officials appeared on TV, assuring the population that "precautionary measures" were being taken, when in reality the reactors were completely out of control.

24 hours after the Tsunami hit, the first explosion occurred, damaging the reactor building of unit 1. Three hours later, the government started evacuating people within a 20km radius.

On 14 March, the whole world watched reactor number 3 blow up in a massive hydrogen explosion, releasing huge amounts of radioactive material into the environment. Helicopters flying over the reactor three days later recorded radiation levels 10 million times the normal value.

But the real danger came from the decay pool of reactor 4, which had been shut down for maintenance.

Used fuel rods still produce huge amounts of heat, and without sufficient cooling they end up melting down, just like the inside of the reactor. However, the difference is that the reactor is contained in a concrete shell, whereas the pool isn't. A meltdown and explosion in a decay pool would have meant the evacuation of Tokyo. By sheer luck it didn't come to that.

Eventually, about 150,000 people were evacuated. 70 workers remained on site and desperately tried to control the disaster. Because of the lack of electricity, most things that should have been operated remotely had to be done manually. There is no reliable information about the fate of these workers.

By mid 2011, there were over 2000 people cleaning up the site. Officially, there are three recorded deaths from worksite accidents. TEPCO says it does not have figures about other deaths and cancer rates but anyone working at the site would have received the allowed lifetime dose of radiation in a few hours of work. Japanese law prevents the workers from talking about what happened.

For ten years, TEPCO has been trying to manage the un-managable. The plan is to dismantle and clean up the site within 30 years, however scientists doubt that this is realistic.

So far, 20 million cubic metres of contaminated soil have been removed from Daiichi, put in plastic bags and stored in paddocks 30km away. They will have to be stored safely for over a hundred years.



Over 1 million cubic metres of contaminated water will be released into the Pacific.

And the problems keep coming. At some stage the damaged reactor bases started leaking and an underground ice wall had to be constructed to prevent contamination of the groundwater.

Because the used cooling water is highly contaminated, it has been put into more than 1000 massive tanks, holding over a million cubic metres, and the site is running out of space. The 'solution' (in more than one sense of the word) is to slowly release the water into the ocean, where it is hoped that it gets sufficiently diluted to not cause too much damage. There is a lot of hope and luck involved in all this and environmental organisations are not so optimistic. Neither are the fishermen whose livelihood depends on being able to sell their fish. Once the radioactive water is released they say, no one will buy their fish, whether it is contaminated or not.

There still is a forbidden zone around Daiichi, but people live just outside that zone. The children there have grown up with strict rules about how long and under what weather conditions they are allowed to go outside. They have learned not to touch plants and not to play on the grass but on the asphalt. They grew up carrying dosimeters wherever they go, which are monitored by a number of grass-roots organisations because the parents don't trust the authorities.

The Olympic games, planned for 2020 and COVID-delayed until mid 2021, are named the "reconstruction games". To show how benign the situation is, TEPCO has donated a training centre called J-Village, situated only a few kilometres from Daiichi. But in 2019, Greenpeace found contaminated soil 100 times over the allowed limit right beside the centre's car park.

Following the disaster, the Japanese government shut down 46 of its 50 nuclear reactors, but nine of them are back online now. There was never an intention to quit nuclear energy, nor any admitting that the technology is inherently unsafe. Tens of thousands of people protesting against restarting the power plants

didn't change that. According to the BBC, an official investigation found that "Fukushima was 'a profoundly man-made disaster', blaming the energy company for failing to meet safety requirements or to plan for such an event."

Around the world, most countries shelved plans for more nuclear power immediately after the disaster.

But a lot of countries are restarting their programmes now. Only Germany has a definitive exit plan and has already permanently shut down 10 of its 16 nuclear plants.

Despite Fukushima having been the fourth major nuclear disaster (Russia 1962, USA 1979, Ukraine 1986, Japan 2011), the nuclear industry is still not giving up, partially boosted by the image of being climate neutral.

According to IAEA, there are currently 443 nuclear reactors in use, and another 50 under construction. 65 were shut down following Fukushima. The countries most keen on hosting the next meltdown are China (12 reactors under construction), India (6) and Russia (3). Britain is planning two new ones, while Bangladesh and Turkey are both building their first reactors.

All this, while there is nowhere in the world where the nuclear waste can be stored permanently, for thousands of years. Finland is currently building a facility near a small town called Eurajoki – for the nuclear waste generated in Finland.

It is ironic that the energy technology that has been most strongly opposed by environmentalists worldwide for 50 years is making a comeback with the image of saving the planet. And many people fall for it.

Even green-leaning British journalist George Monbiot seems to have had his brain connected to the grid when he wrote in the *Guardian* just 10 days after the Fukushima meltdown, and long before any real figures about casualties were known, "Why Fukushima made me stop worrying and love nuclear power":

"As a result of the disaster at Fukushima, I am no longer nuclear-neutral. I now support the technology. A crappy old plant with inadequate safety features was hit by a monster earthquake and a vast tsunami. The electricity supply failed, knocking out the cooling system. The reactors began to explode and melt down.

The disaster exposed a familiar legacy of poor design and corner-cutting. Yet, as far as we know, no one has yet received a lethal dose of radiation."

He went on to claim that "some greens have wildly exaggerated the dangers of radioactive pollution." Monbiot's pattern of arguments is familiar. The reality is that there is no safe level of radiation. Every bit is damaging and can cause long term health problems, typically cancer.

The number of confirmed deaths immediately following the Chernobyl disaster was only about 50. But another 4000 are estimated to have died of cancer in the years following. A simple fire (not even a meltdown) in the British facility Windscale (later renamed 'Sellafield' to get rid of the bad PR) in 1957 caused no immediate deaths but it is estimated to have killed up to 240 people over time, according to a UK government report.

Maybe Monbiot would like to explain to those families that the dangers of nuclear fallout are "wildly exaggerated".

@@@

What Labour's Housing Policy means for you:

If you're renting

It's likely your rent will go up at the next opportunity. This may or may not be related to the policy changes, since landlords can raise the rent for any reason. Your rent may go up as a result of higher prices for potatoes as well. You didn't really think that Labour designed this for you, did you?

If you're owning your own home

This used to be pretty much the norm for most people over 30 in this country, but now it is considered a weird exception. Just go to an open home and check out how many other potential buyers are looking for a family home. Not many. For you, nothing will change because you will still only own one home. And you can't sell it because in the time span between the sale going through and you buying another home, prices will have gone up so much that you won't be able to afford it. So stay where you are and don't rock the boat. And don't lose your job.

If you own a rental property

Not much will change for you either because you can always recover lost income from tax deductions from your tenants. The Real Estate Institute has already threatened that: "Many landlords are likely to increase their rent in the coming years as they look to offset the costs". With costs they mean income tax.

If you own multiple investment properties

You probably already have all your properties in trusts where you don't pay any taxes, or claim all of them as your own personal home, so not much changes for you. It's unlikely that the government will send people around to check if you are actually living in any of these houses. After all, you're a trustworthy capitalist.

If you're looking to buy a first home

Come on, really? Dream on. The First Home Grant and Loan scheme? You'll have to earn the right amount, find a house for less than 60% of the average price and convince a bank to loan you 95% on it – how likely is that?

@@@

What's Happening in Myanmar?

KT Julian

ON FEBRUARY 1, 2021, the military ousted the very popular elected government - Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD). The people, led by factory workers, students, and government employees, called for a mass Civil Disobedience Movement and took to the streets. The military responded by shooting and arresting demonstrators, journalists and random passers-by. As of the 20th of April, 800-ish had been killed and 3000-ish arrested. Many of those arrested have disappeared, with families unable to find out where they are and if they are OK. In several cases, bodies have been returned to families showing signs of torture.

This has happened before, right?

You might be thinking of 1988, when thousands of high school and university student protestors were gunned down in the streets. Many fled to the border areas with Thailand, China, India and Bangladesh, where they took shelter and aligned themselves with the various ethnic groups fighting the central government.

You might be thinking of 1962, when General Ne Win, using these same ethnic insurgencies as excuse, took over from Burma's first post-independence government.

There were also uprisings in 1974, 1996 and 2007. The military has always been widely loathed by the civilian population.

Or 2017, when the Bamar Buddhist-dominated military, with the tacit support of the Bamar Buddhist-dominated NLD government, massacred and expelled much of the Rohingya Muslim population from Rakhine State into refugee camps in Bangladesh.

Myanmar/Burma/Bamar?

The country as is is a construct of the colonial British.

Prior to 1824, the folks living there comprised various peoples with a variety of governance systems, sometimes cooperating, sometimes in conflict. Like pretty much everywhere. The British set borders, some of which ran arbitrarily through indigenous groups' lands, some of which still designate national borders.

Broadly, the largest group living in the central plains area were of Bamar ethnicity and predominantly Buddhist. The less numerous groups living in the surrounding mountainous areas are Chin, Karen, Pa-O, Rakhine, Karenni, Mon, Wa, Palaung, Kachin, Rohingya, Lisu, Shan, or any of the other 250+ different ethnicities. Some of whom are Buddhist, others Christian, Muslim, or practice traditional animist religions. 'Burma' was used as a catch-all. In 1989 the military government of the day officially changed this to 'Myanmar', and using 'Burma' became a badge of affiliation/solidarity with exiled activists. There is no agreement amongst people in Burma as to whether one or the other term is more or less inclusive.

Aung San Suu Kyi. Good or bad?

The daughter of Burma's independence hero General Aung San came to prominence in the wake of the 1988 uprising. She spent most of the next 20 years under house arrest for speaking out against military rule (and in favour of human rights) picking up a Nobel Peace Prize along the way. Hence the international disappointment when she finally was elected to power, but did not use her platform to speak out against ongoing oppression of the Rohingya, Kachin, Karen, journalists and environmental activists. She even went so far as to travel to Europe to defend the military at the International Criminal Court.

She is widely beloved in the country where many people refer to her as 'Mother Suu'.



Anarchists demonstrating in Yangon, February 2021
credit: Thiha



Protestors wearing Dr Sasa (National Unity Government) masks
give three-fingered salute

Why the coup, then?

A few suggestions: The military were slowly losing relevance. Their proxy party lost the election by a huge majority, and even the 25% of allocated seats they held in parliament was not necessarily going to accord them the degree of power they were accustomed to. General Min Aung Hlaing wanted a chance for greater personal enrichment like some of his predecessors. There were rumours of a tiff between him and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

So the demonstrators want a return to the 2020 status quo (minus the Covid)?

Some. Many are asking for the release of DASSK and the NLD government. Others are demanding a genuine federal system, with ethnic areas having much more control over their economic, educational, political and environmental systems. There are those wanting far more radical change. Some are more modestly requesting not to be shot, political prisoners released, the internet back on.

What's the plan?

The main thrust is Civil Disobedience. Alongside Myanmar's half a million garment factory workers, government workers including medical staff, teachers, banks and transport workers are striking. The idea being that if these key workers are not cooperating, the government can't function and will hopefully give up. This strategy requires support – money to help strikers support families and deal with the growing lack of food available.

Since the military have proven murderous, protestors are resorting to creative avenues of dissent – using dolls, toys, signs. Neighbourhoods are barricading themselves off and setting watches to protect protestors in homes. Some folk are heading for the borders.

There's a call to form a Federal Army, comprising ethnic armed organisations, deserters (not so many yet, but hoping for more) and recruits from the cities.



Egg protest: Pyit Taing Htaung dolls represent resilience and are a safer substitute for live protestors.

This might or might not happen under the guidance of the National Unity Government (elected MPs and representatives from Ethnic Armed Organisations, who have notoriously resisted cooperating with each other in the past).

What can we do?

Support the strikers. They need money to support their families whilst not working. There are a number of fundraisers online. One anarchist-aligned initiative is Mutual Aid Myanmar (see link at end), and there are loads of fundraisers focusing on specific regions, women, labour unions, different ethnic groups, or professional associations. More locally, you can contact the Freedom Shop for up to date info on what initiatives are current.

An incomplete reading list:

Myanmar Now, Frontier Myanmar, Mizzima and *The Irrawaddy* are Burmese and English language publications offering high-quality, reliable, regular journalism from the ground. Consider making a donation or subscribing.

Histories of Burma: Rose Metro and Aung Khine. Mote Oo Education, 2014

The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia: James C. Scott, 2009

The Enemy Within – Buddhist Violence and the Making of a Muslim 'Other': Francis Wade, 2017

The Coming of the Coup: Observations on the current situation in Burma: Khin Zaw Win
www.rosalux.de/en/news/id/44011/the-coming-of-the-coup

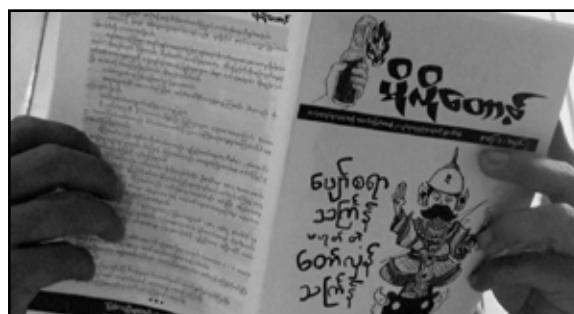
Fundraising:

www.mutualaidmyanmar.org

Food not Bombs - Myanmar:

www.facebook.com/fnbmyanmar

@@



With internet mostly shot down, activists go back to the old-ways, distributing 'Molotov' and other zines around the country.

A Show of Strength with Your Boy's Brigade

Sam Buchanan

THE DECISION by the Labour-led government in 2018 to splash out on four new anti-submarine aircraft is both indicative of the New Zealand government's intent to remain a member of the white wealthy Western people's club and a grand example of how to make unpopular decisions in a supposed democracy.

The purchase of the four Boeing P-8 Poseidon aircraft, a military derivation of the Boeing 737, was announced in mid-2018, with an estimated cost of \$2.3 billion. Quite a sum given the little cash the government manages to find for pressing social needs.

The P-8 is a maritime patrol aircraft. It is capable of carrying out a number of roles, but is primarily equipped for anti-submarine warfare. It is this capacity, requiring sophisticated sensors and armament, that makes the things so damn expensive. The US coastguard operates C-130 Hercules as maritime patrol aircraft, performing tasks including search and rescue, fisheries protection, environmental protection and drug interdiction, as well as cargo and passenger transport. Notably, these are the tasks that have been highlighted by the government in the decision to purchase the P-8s. However, the coastguard aircraft, lacking the specifically war fighting equipment, are less than half the price of the P-8.

When it replaces the old P-3 Orions, it will be the New Zealand government's only combat aircraft, aside from military helicopters. Why this country needs an anti-submarine aircraft hasn't been explained, which is unsurprising, because we don't.

The New Zealand airforce developed an anti-submarine capacity with the acquisition of P-3 aircraft in 1966. At that time New Zealand contributed to the United States

global monitoring of oceans in order to detect Soviet submarines, though decades of patrolling by the NZ P-3s failed to ever detect any hostile submarine. There was no threat to New Zealand then, and there isn't now.

So why buy these aircraft? In an article supportive of the purchase, Euan Graham, from Australia's right-wing Lowy Institute, put it this way: "One way to view the P-8 decision is as a hefty down payment on New Zealand's continued membership of the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing framework."

A defence report from 2000, Report to the Official's Group considering Maritime Patrol Needs, highlights the value of an aircraft that is interoperable with other country's militaries – the US, UK and Australia all operate the P-8, and South Korea and India are ordering them, making joint operations with these countries practical. The report also notes the need for a maritime patrol aircraft as a means to contribute to the Five Powers Defence Arrangement (sometimes referred to as the 'Durian Pact', after a particularly violent fruit), between Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia and the United Kingdom.

Largely, then, these aircraft are not serving New Zealand's needs, but are an expensive diplomatic tool, to maintain New Zealand's presence in certain part of the world, and to buy our way into a particular military club.

The decision was largely kept out of the public eye, as defence decisions tend to be. In the past, a broadly focused peace movement made this impossible, but that movement has shrunk over the last few decades and the watchdog role it played over defence spending



hasn't been a priority. The decision to purchase the ANZAC class frigates, saw a huge amount of public campaigning, ultimately only partially successful, as the purchase went ahead, though the desired four frigates was first cut to three, then to two.

In tandem with the decline of anti-military activism, the defence force have successfully passed themselves off as an institution upholding liberal values, primarily concerned with peace keeping, relief and other humanitarian concerns. In this case, the war fighting and anti-submarine capacity of the planes has been played down. Many leftists have bought into the idea that the P-8s will be used mainly for fisheries protection and search and rescue work (search and rescue operations by the airforce happen about once a month on average, which hardly justifies maintaining four large modern aircraft).

Obscure technical details are also used to keep the public disinterested in defence decisions, a methodology also used in climate and other environmental debates. To understand the political consequences of buying a P-8 rather than a C-130, you'll need to know what purpose sonobuoys, acoustic sensor systems, Harpoon missiles and High-Altitude ASW Weapons serve.

The P-8 purchase is a done deal. However, it tells us a lot about how the Labour government sees our place in the world – a junior partner in the policing of the world by Western governments – and also tells us to keep a closer watch on 'defence' purchases, and the politics behind them.

@@@

BOOK REVIEW

K. Winter

Rat King Landlord

Rat King Landlord by Murdoch Stephens, Lawrence & Gibson 2020

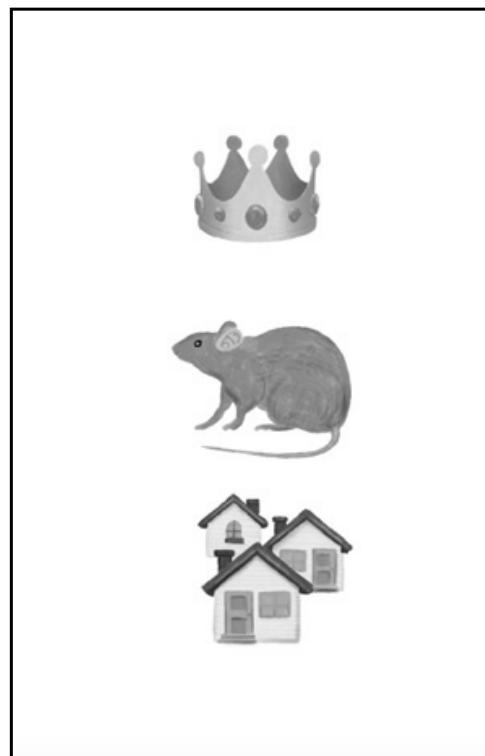
AN ACCESSIBLE, entertaining, weirdly affirming novel about growing unrest among renters in Wellington city. I'm trying to summarise my feelings about this book without giving too much away, and I've landed on this: it's a bit surreal, but it's very real.

For weeks I've been talking to other renters about our growing fury; years of feeling powerless and disconnected are coming to a head. The bohemian romance of moving flat at least once a year wore off a long, long time ago. Those of us in 'good' situations – affordable or at least hopefully long term leases in cold homes – are in a state of perpetual waiting. We've been waiting without knowing what we're waiting for. Waiting for the 'next step'. There is no next step for us now. The housing crisis is a joke, the numbers are like damage counters in a Final Fantasy end-game boss battle. They're so huge, is what I'm saying, and they also don't make a bit of difference.

I'm not desperate to be an owner-occupier. But I am increasingly desperate to be able to build a consistent sense of home and belonging, and to be able to invest in long term community relationships. And I'm an adult surrounded by other adults and none of us have any way to make that happen within the current system. And we've been listless because of it for years, but increasingly I see that we are angry.

Rat King Landlord helped me channel and clarify that anger, and gave me creative and quite possibly practical dreams to 'abolish landlording'. Renters should read it and feel strengthened, and then meet me outside the Quinovic offices with a pile of smooth stones.

@@@



A TRAVEL bubble with Australia has been created and 'COVID passports' and vaccine passes are in the news. In both Australia and NZ these passes are mostly talked about in relation to the opening of borders with ever more countries: COVID passports will be needed to allow access to travel.

Worldwide the introduction of COVID passports and vaccine passes are being sold in very emotive terms – playing not only on our fear of the virus but also on the wish to put the pandemic behind us, to forget about COVID and return to that blissful image of 'normal' life. In this country we are lucky (so far) as normality can mean as little as not wearing masks on public transport anymore, for some NZers normality also means the ability to visit family or the 'right' to go for a holiday overseas. For many other people around the world, COVID passes mean the way out of a lockdown. It literally means the chance to socially interact with others in the same physical space.

Of course, most people do want to see the end of the domination of COVID and a pass may allow that. However, there has been minimal debate on how COVID passports and vaccine passes will be used and what the consequences of their use may be. Rather, their introduction is presented as an inevitability.

It is not certain what will be recorded on COVID passports. It is assumed that the passports will show if a person has been vaccinated or has natural antibodies, but in the UK vaccine passes will also be given to people who have had a recent negative test. A negative test is only good until the person becomes infected which could be literally ten minutes after the test was taken.

Even if a person has been vaccinated there are still many questions about the actual effectiveness of a vaccine. It is still not known if a COVID vaccine gives a person immunity for all the strains. We also don't know how long any immunity will last; current research shows that immunity following natural infection can last for about eight months. Scientists hope that immunity from the vaccine lasts longer.

And most importantly, as the NZ Ministry of Health states, it is unknown if vaccinated people can still catch the virus and be a carrier of it. We basically don't know yet if the vaccines stop, for certain, transmission of COVID.

There are also ethical and moral questions that need to be asked about vaccine passes and COVID passports.

Vaccine passes

Vaccine passes are not new. Yellow Fever Vaccination Certificates, for example, are still required when visiting certain countries, and before it was eradicated in the US, yellow fever immunity certificates were a part of life in the south. It is said that these certificates helped create and maintain the southern US class system. Society was already sharply defined by race, income and free-status: whites, gens de couleur libre (free people of colour) and slaves but with Yellow Fever Vaccination Certificates there were sub-groups of people who did not have certificates. During the late 1800s and early 1900s the value of a slave was based on their immunity status and only those white non-slaves with immunity certificates could get jobs, have bank loans, or get married. The Vaccination Certificates saw the creation of more underclasses of excluded people.

The idea of a modern vaccine pass has also been raised this century. ID2020 is one of the goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, it is a programme to ensure that everyone (that is everyone in the world) has a unique ID. The UN ideal is to have a global digital identity system for all people so no one can ever be excluded from society because of lack of physical identity documents. The belief is that digital ID will empower marginalised people, including refugees, so it will no longer matter if people lose hardcopy identity documents. With digital ID everyone will have their own unique ID: it will be an identification system based on biometric data. In 2019, when discussing the reality of developing a global digital ID system, ID2020 talked of the "opportunity for immunisation to serve as a platform for digital identity" and a plan "to leverage immunization as an opportunity to establish digital identity".

ID2020 and their 2019 summit pre-date COVID as do conversations about digital ID at the annual World Economic Forum gathering at Davos. For the last few years the Forum has been discussing the idea of a global ID system (one of their dreams is to have a cashless society based on digital ID).

Because of ID2020 and Davos, there are numerous conspiracy theories around the introduction of any vaccine passes. It's an easy rabbit-hole to fall down and people should be especially careful about the conspiracies around the UN 2030 Agenda, these are dominated by the extreme right.

Return to Normality

A few countries have already introduced COVID passports and the World Health Organisation began piloting a digital vaccine certificate scheme with Estonia in October last year. Since February 2021 Israel has had a 'Green Pass' for all those people who have been vaccinated. Having a pass means people can access public places such as gyms, theatres, concerts, pools, sporting events, weddings, pubs, hotels and indoor dining at restaurants. Other places introducing COVID passes include China, England, the EU and Japan.

Here in NZ Covid-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins said that NZ is "...actively involved in the conversations around vaccine passports. ... I think vaccine passports are almost an inevitability at some point in the future and probably the not-too-distant future." Hipkins has also said that COVID passports will probably not be limited to only access to travel.

Meanwhile, without waiting for any government decision, both Qantas and Air New Zealand are already part of the COVID IATA Travel Pass trial. IATA, the International Air Transport Association, are industry based. They come from the position that travel is good for the airline industry and a Travel Pass will get people moving again; to them it's a win-win situation as the resultant tourism and travel will ensure the airline industry will survive COVID, and governments haven't spoken out against it as international travel will have a flow-on positive effect on a country's economy. (At this stage IATA have said that they are reluctant to allow a pass to be used for anything other than travel).

The IATA Travel Pass prioritises consumerism and the privileged who think travel and holidaying overseas is a normal part of one's life. The Pass will give people the freedom to travel again and see the world – a chance to get back to 'normality'. A normality that is

pictured in numerous IATA adverts as the ability to travel to 'exotic' sunny islands.

Privileged Pass Holders

International travel could definitely become normal again with the advent of COVID passports and IATA Travel Passes. Planes could be full of privileged people from privileged countries travelling the world, but now even more privileged than from the time of travel before COVID.

The gaps between the haves and have-nots, between countries and within countries, will probably expand. There will be disparity of access to vaccines. Travel Passes and COVID passports will see people sorted and classified into different groups even more than now: there will be those who can travel and those who cannot, and, in some countries, there will be those who can access certain public spaces and those who cannot. It could literally be 'no pass' means 'no entry' to sports games, cinemas, libraries, museums and a multitude of other places.

There will also be parts of the world that open their borders to the privileged vaccinated tourist regardless of the vaccination status of their own population. This could lead to even more of a 'disposable' population.

Just as a result of the Yellow Fever Immunity Certificate in the southern US was a cementing of class relationships that are still relevant today, COVID passes could expand and create more inequalities in the world.

Surveillance Increases

However, what is equally important is the expansion and normalising of the role of surveillance in society. When we talk 'surveillance', the focus is often on surveillance used as a form of control and discipline, it's often the targeted type of surveillance on a certain person or groups of people who are usually perceived as the threat to the status quo. COVID passports,

The advertisement features a large, bold title "BOOK SUMMER VACCINES ARE COMING" in the center. To the left, a starburst graphic contains the text "FROM £24.99". Below the title, it says "No change fee. T&Cs apply." and a "Book now" button. On the right, there is a circular inset showing a hand holding a vaccine vial with the text "JAB & GO!". The background shows a group of people smiling and holding up their phones, suggesting a happy travel experience.

RyanAir ran a 'Jab & Go' campaign in British media to promote travelling and return to normality

however, are more in line with the advent of the smart city and the use of data to 'enable us all' to have a more perfect experience interacting in 'our environments'. Buzz words for these forms of surveillance include statements like 'ease', 'efficiency', 'safety' and 'convenience' – all working to create the perfect society and the perfect experience for the individual.

COVID passports will definitely enable some people to have a better experience in the world during the COVID pandemic. But again, we need to be asking the questions of whose 'efficiency, safety and ease', whose 'normality' we are talking about and at what cost to those non-privileged people. Just as the COVID passes will enable access for people, they will also exclude a lot of people. Could we see ourselves ending up in some type of dystopian nightmare where a COVID pass is needed for entry to more and more things: to your school, to rent a home, to hop on the bus?

In the rush to introduce COVID passes, there appears to be little discussion of the effect of vaccine passes on society and the world.

We also need to be finding out what information will be included on vaccine passes; we need to discuss how much of a person's biological and medical data will be included on a pass and who will have access to all that data. We need to think about their use: will they only be for travel or will we see function creep occur and these passes will then be needed to access public

places and events (as is already happening in Israel and England). We also need to question the consequences of allowing private digital health data to be used in the public domain. A COVID passport could be a gigantic leap forward for corporate and state surveillance.

Will these vaccine passes end up being the start of a biometric international mandatory digital ID system?

Conclusion

The introduction of vaccine and immunity passes is an amazing opportunity for individual governments to introduce ID systems, and it can also be the slippery slope for the normalisation and introduction of a global digital biomedical ID system.

Regardless of what happens to COVID, pandemics will come again, and in the fight to win against pandemics there will always be an expanding array of data gathering and surveillance tools.

In this country we have already become used to the COVID Tracker App, we may soon have a COVID passport. We do need to protect ourselves and our communities from COVID, but we need to remember that it is not normal for the state to know where you were, what shops, public places you visited in the last two weeks and nor is bio-surveillance normal.

@@@

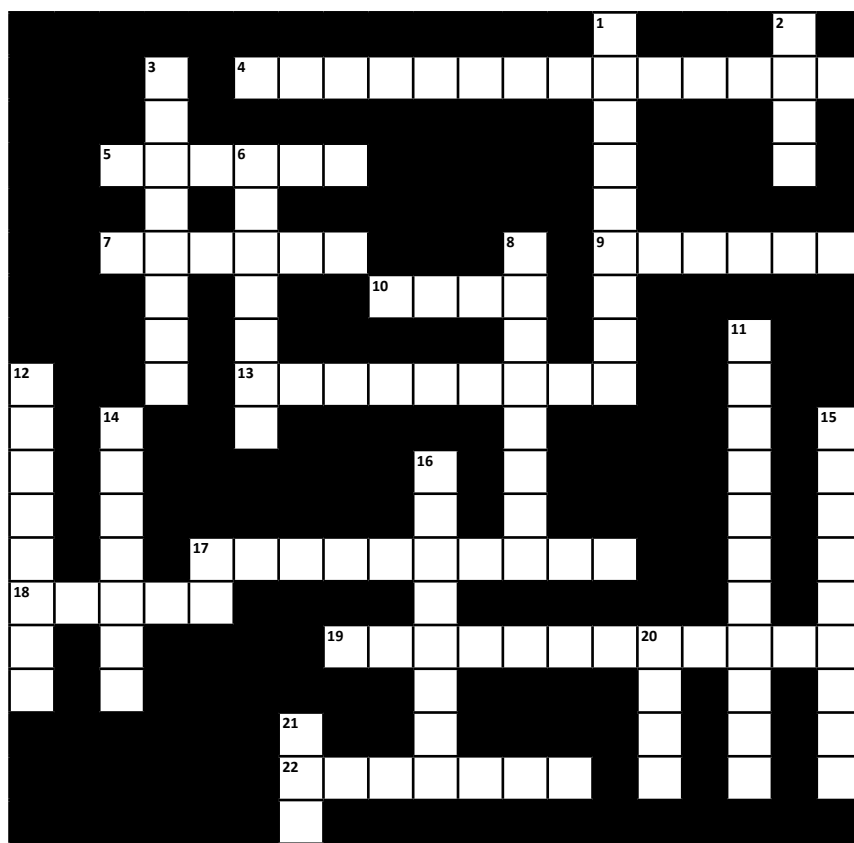


cartoon by Vanessa Gurung

Aarghword

CROSSWORD

All the words in this crossword can be found in this issue of Aargh.



Across

4. reorganisation of assets to new ownership
5. changes ownership
7. cultural experiences that provoke laughter
9. a belief that groups of people have different behavioural traits based on physical traits
10. an illegal overthrow of a government
13. a group who identify with each other based on shared traits
17. not subject to the usual rules
18. holder of exclusive control of an object
19. the expression of a single social or ethnic group
22. to end the observance and effect of something

Down

1. power to influence or command
2. positive
3. making a mistake that should not have been made (*two words*)
6. narratives of related experiences
8. outbreak against authority
11. a person is confined by the authorities to their residence (*two words*)
12. unscrupulous, neglectful owner of derelict properties
14. a person with an agreement to co-operate
15. a standard, regular way of being
16. controlling by one group of people over other group/s
17. practice of deliberately managing information in order to affect public perception (*abbreviation*)
20. words used together with a specific meaning
21. negative

Answers on page 19.

Francis Barraclough: "Here's a character of mine I created a while back called Anakitty, they're a Squire who wanders around quoting Kropotkat and Emma Goldman"



It is Impossible not to be Political

Interview with the Choclo Collective

The Freedom Shop

Intro: *The Choclo Collective is a group of political artists from Latin America in Wellington that was started in mid 2020 when the collective organised a series of film screenings under the title Cine Golondrina in Newtown. Some of their members were involved in creating the mural in Riddiford St (next to the McDonald's) and organising solidarity events with the protests in Chile.*

In December 2020, aargh spoke with Mire from Peru, and Antonio and Wara from Chile. At the time, there were huge protests in Chile, triggered by a price increase for the metro trains. The protests broadened and led to a new constitution. In Peru, president Vizcarra was removed in a coup, which sparked mass protests in which two young people were killed.

This text is part one of the conversation where we talk about the Choclo collective and the experience of Latin Americans in Aotearoa.

Freedom Shop: What does the name Choclo mean and what is the collective?

Mire: Choclo means corn. Every Latin American country has its own name for corn, but they also share the indigenous name choclo. That is why we chose the name, it's our common name for a food that was sacred to the Inkas.

Wara: Choclo collective is a collective of Latin American artists, who all want to express ourselves through art, create community and get involved with the NZ community in Wellington and showcase our art. And together we're stronger, so we are collaborating to create a platform to show our art and our ideas.

Mire: And also, when we started it, we thought about different kinds of collaborations, mostly with Latin American artists but also with local artists, with Māori artists so that we can create different lines of Choclo. For example Cine Golondrina is of course involved with movies, productions and all that, but there is another line that is called Projeto Camote. It is called camote because of the relationship between the indigenous food that we have that is called camote and here we

have the kumara, which is exactly the same and it came originally from that side of the world. It makes us realise the interchange back in the days between our cultures – Māori culture and indigenous people from South America. So that is why it's called Projeto Camote. We want to improve the collaboration with local Māori artists and indigenous people from our countries too.

It's about giving space to our art because we realise that there are a lot of immigrants from Latin America, artists living here who are working in completely different stuff, just because of survival, basically. So by creating this platform we can also have them doing their stuff instead of doing different kind of jobs, just because they need the money.

Antonio: We want to make political art to show what is happening in Latin America, in our reality. I put my energy in my artist part, too, and with the other people in the collective, we are in the same point of view. The idea of Projeto Camote to put the part of the protest in Latin America there because in Chile, camote is a stone too. When you are in a fight, you take a camote to throw at the police. We were talking about making that connection between the kumara and the camote from Peru and the camote from Chile.

Freedom Shop: Did the art come first, or the politics for you?

Antonio: It's all together, really. Everyone in the collective has a different point of view of what political art is. For me, all the stuff that I am making has something political – my documentaries, my pictures. I try to show the reality of Latin America when I was living there. I think that is political because I want to show what is happening there, there is a lot of injustice and it is sad but most of the time it is a fight with the lives. So I want to put that in, and contribute, that is my reality. Personally, I want to put the political and the art together. The collective has more tendency to make political stuff, too. But we are open to make just art. We are 8 people in the collective and we all have different views.



Mire: Yes, we all have different points of view about that but most of us believe that everything is a political art. And it doesn't have to be militant to be political. So, taking pictures, taking street pictures is a political art. So in a way we are pretty political because we are all showing what's happening in our countries. Like Antonio said, there are some of us who are trying to be less militant in a way, they prefer to use the art with a different perspective, maybe. But for the things that we've been doing, the film screenings and everything you can say that our inclination as a collective is political. Also, coming from South America, it's impossible not to be political. In a way we are always thinking where we came from when we are doing stuff.

Wara: In my experience as a Chilean, it's impossible not to be part of politics because we are a result of policies that have been put in place. We as human beings are always in a dialogue with politics. The CIA in the 80s, 70s and 60s, and to this day have politically influenced the area so that we don't rise up. They have for a long time kept us down and that creates a polarity because there is the people who benefit from it and there is the rest who are eating the crumbs. That creates a problem because there are the people who are afraid of certain politics because it's a dangerous thing because we live where politics dictates how you will be treated in places and at the same time that's why we want to talk about this because we feel like we need to speak up. So these realities become relevant and people who don't understand how important politics are get a grasp on how it affects us in our everyday life.

Freedom Shop: How did it feel coming to this country, because so many people here think politics is something over there. It's impolite to talk about it.

Wara: It was strange, very strange. I feel like New Zealanders are really afraid of that divide. They work really hard to keep the dream alive, NZ together, and I feel as an outsider coming in with all this knowledge, and telling you that politics matter kind of breaks that dream. And that can be met with a bit of resistance. You are tarnishing the fake reality that is being implemented in purpose as well. Like the impression of what they believe NZ is. I remember having problems with my friend when he said that the rivers are so nice around here. But most of the rivers are polluted as fuck in NZ. NZ rivers are among the most polluted rivers in the first world. And he was really offended, he was like "I don't like how you're talking about this, you don't have right to talk about this because you're not from here". I sent him an article from the NZ Herald and said "I read it last week, this is reality. The fact that you don't know about this is because you choose not to be informed. But as a person who comes from another place, I read the newspaper now and then."

And that applies to everything. It applies to race problems as well, I feel like the *Pākehā* community is really afraid of talking about race, they get defensive and at the same time they feel there is the white guilt. And then the new generations want to change things, but a lot of time they come off like trying to be white saviours. There is a whole thing...

It's a lovely place but at the same time it's got its problems and coming from the outside I feel like NZ has everything for being a working society when these problems are not existent. There is no reason – there is enough resources for everyone, there is enough of everything. There is not even that many people. So I would like people to be more informed so this doesn't become like everywhere else, because we have it better here. But you have to understand that the people who are implementing all these things that are pulling people down everywhere else are going to be applied in NZ at some point, and they have been. And I would like it not to be like everywhere else, I would like NZ to be that green dream that we have.

Freedom Shop: Have you been to any of the largish NZ protests and if you have, how did they compare to Latin American protests? What's different? Do we know how to protest?

(Laughter)

Antonio: Here the protests are cute. It's beautiful – you can see cops. It's like a normal street and lines. In Chile you know it's going to end with fire and fighting with the cops. It's normal. I have never been on a protest with a really nice end. Most of the times it's a fight.

I've been here on one protest here, the Black Lives Matter. It was really intense because you feel the racism here. It was strong for me too, to see a lot of people, white, brown, and black people protesting against that, because in Chile I feel like a white person but here I am not white. I am different. I am part of another person... Here you feel you have right to protest. In Chile you know how it's going to end – 200 people lost their eyes and 42 were killed. It's the same shit that happened in '73, people disappeared, tortured.

Wara: Bodies found in warehouses...

Antonio: ...with bullet holes. It was like the dictatorship, it was like you have been living in the shadow of a kind of democracy for 35, 40 years in a kind of democracy but it was all fake. It never was that. The protest now is like a civil war. And when I saw the protest here, it was like 'wow'. It was good 'cos nobody gets hurt but when you make that protest in Chile, it's like "cool, yeah" and nothing will happen. But they started change in Chile because the people are in the street fighting, really fighting against the police. It was the only way because if you are poor there, you don't have rights. You can go into the public school, the public hospital but it's shit.

You don't want to go, you don't want to be sick. I waited two years to take out one of my wisdom teeth.

Mire: We come from pretty violent environments. I have never been in a protest here, I think. But I was at the Chilean protest...

Wara: But we have been making a lot of noise, for months.

Antonio: I feel that too. We need to do something for the people there. And that was the idea for us to do fundraising. To start to move the people here because here you can make more money quickly.

Wara: That's actually how we met. Taking pictures in the Chile protests.

MORE TO FOLLOW...

@@@



Mollie McGuire’s Cookery Corner Presents:

Home-made No-knead Bread

During the lock-down I was one of those people who started to regularly make bread. It’s easy, delicious and it’s one way to ensure some warmth in a home, especially on a cold winter day.

What you need for two loaves are:

- 600 g strong white bread flour
- 400 g wholemeal flour
- handfuls of seeds: sunflowers, pumpkin seeds, sesame, linseed.
- 2 dessertspoons salt
- 4-6 g fresh yeast (or 1-3 g dried or instant yeast)
- 780 g warm water
- handful of flour
- a little hot tap water

Preparation:

1. Mix the dry ingredients in a large bowl
2. Add the yeast to the water and then stir it slowly into the dry ingredients until no traces of flour are left. The result is a sticky mixture, but it will mix!
3. Cover with a plate and leave to rise for 6-12 hours. It should double in size.
4. Split the dough into two and turn it onto a clean, floured work surface. Sprinkle a little flour over each and then turn them over. These are the two loaves.
5. For each loaf fold the edges of the dough towards the middle as if you were making an envelope then roll the dough so the side with the folds faces down. Sprinkle a little flour over and leave them to rest under a tea-towel for 20-30 minutes. (If the dough flattens or loses shape, then repeat the folding and leave for another 20-30 minutes).
6. Rub some flour on your hands and then shape each loaf into a bread shape, this is where you’re going to stretch the bread to help make it rise some more and look more bread-like. You hold the side furthest away from you and pull it away and then fold it into the middle, then do it for each side and then roll the loaf over again so the seam side is face down.
7. Sprinkle flour on top and then cover with a tea-towel again and leave for another 2-3 hours until the loaves have doubled-again.
8. Turn the oven on the hottest it will go with a baking tray at the bottom.
9. When the oven is hot place a loaf on the oven tray and sprinkle some hot water also on the tray. You have to be quick doing this as you don’t want the oven to lose all its heat.
10. After 20 minutes open the oven door for a few seconds to release any steam, then bake for another 10 minutes.
11. Take out of oven and bake the next loaf.
12. Leave each loaf to cool for an hour before eating.

If you decide you like making bread, then invest in a Dutch Oven; the whole baking thing is easier with one.

If you don’t like making bread, then use the flour to make some wheat-paste and put up posters on windows of Quinovic offices.

Across

1. authority

2. good

3. mea culpa

6. stories

8. uprisng

11. house arrest

Down

12. slumlord

14. partner

15. normality

16. colonial

17. PR

20. term

21. bad

4. reconstruction

5. passes

7. humour

9. racism

10. coup

13. ethnicity

17. privileged

18. owner

19. monocultural

22. abolish

Aarghword Answers (from page 15)

The First Casualty of War

BOOK REVIEW

Sam Buchanan

The Duty to Stand Aside: Nineteen Eighty-Four and the Wartime Quarrel of George Orwell and Alex Comfort by Eric Laursen. AK Press, 176pp, 2018.

TAKING THE gold for 'ponderous sub-title of the decade' – especially as the book is largely unrelated to the novel 1984 – this short, but rich, book covers a lot of ground. An obscure gem if you are interested in anti-war activism, state terrorism or 1940s British male leftists.

The quarrel of the title was a debate carried on between George Orwell, who felt backing the British government against Naziism was necessary and unavoidable in the circumstances of the day, and the anarchist Alex Comfort, who considered a principled stand against the British Empire and its war practices vital.

We see Orwell at his worst – petty, grumpy and judgemental, and Comfort (known principally for his later book *The Joy of Sex*) isn't much better. The debate was carried out in private, in letters to magazines and in published verse. The latter sounds quite pleasant, but they were both effectively accusing the other of backing fascism.

Orwell considered a US/British victory crucial ("In so far as it hampers the British war effort, British pacifism is on the side of the Nazis...") both to defeat Hitler, and later, to save at least some of Europe from Stalin. Comfort maintained that the British government was creeping towards fascism, and that, at the end of the war, only anarcho-pacifists would continue holding genuinely anti-fascist views. They would "be entrusted with saving what remains of civilised values from Hitler, or alternatively from Churchill".

Comfort wasn't really a pacifist, advocating armed resistance against fascism in occupied countries. And Orwell, despite his deep consciousness, and love, of his English heritage, wasn't a patriot. His dislike of leftist intellectuals he considered unwilling to get their hands dirty and insufficiently opposed to totalitarianism framed his views. He had a point. The left intelligentsia have often taken anti-imperialism to the extent of tolerating, or even celebrating, dictators who claimed to oppose imperialism. Orwell's sharply self-critical

understanding of the colonial mentality in which he was raised (and worked in, as a colonial policeman in Burma) is much more attractive, and modern, than the faux-internationalism of Eurocentric academics.

Comfort had a point too. The British government's colonial atrocities and embrace of mass bombing of civilians should have made anyone think twice about backing them as a supposed weapon against tyranny.

Britain's WWII bombing campaign was deeply controversial even at the time. During the war the government never admitted it was targeting civilians, claiming attacks on cities were aimed at industrial capacity. A 1941 poll cited in the book found the majority of Londoners – despite being bombed themselves – still opposed the bombing of German cities. And the effectiveness of the strategy in contributing to winning the war is debated, given the vast amount of resources invested in it, the high rate of aircraft losses and the less than expected impacts.

The book is littered with interesting factoids and the personalities involved are fascinating, though it's mostly a boy's outing, the odd appearance of Marie-Louise Berneri and Vera Brittain in the cast notwithstanding. One photo shows Orwell working at the BBC along with anarchist art critic Herbert (later Sir Herbert) Read, Canadian anarchist writer George Woodcock, poets Edmund Blunden and William Empson and Indian novelist and independence activist Mulk Raj Anand. It was quite a milieu.

The book is pleasantly inconclusive about the debate (it possibly learns towards Comfort), which makes for a much more interesting read than a determined polemic. It's nice to be reminded that political squabbles and name-calling pre-date the internet, and the core of the debate remains current: to what extent do we support one state versus a probably worse one? As we now find ourselves at the beginning of a new cold war between the US and China, the dismal intellectual climate that comes of justifying a lesser evil in desperate times, and all the lies and misrepresentations that stem from that, is unfortunately going to be with us again.

@@@